

# The Bottom of My Heart

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When Percy sat down to start writing his manuscript, he barely got a few words in before the steady pumping of the heart on his bookshelf distracted him.

*Ba-dump. Ba-dum-ba-dump.*

Its beating was erratic and inconsistent, rising to quick crescendos then slowing down to a steady pulse, agonizingly unstable. Stop it, he practically begged the thing. He had tried the same routine earlier in the day, and the heart had refused to quell. It clearly couldn't listen to reason.

This wasn't his first experience with someone else's heart. Back in the seventh grade, he had a little thing with a girl named Holly. They swapped organs beneath the school bleachers during PE. Her heart was soft, beating with delicacy that contrasted Holly's rough exterior. It was intoxicating, and he kept it in a shoe box underneath his bed surrounded by a bunch of kleenexes, fearing it would dry out. Two weeks later his mom found it and forced him to return it, and he spent the next two months grounded.

This time, it was like her heart was guiltling him. *Look what you've done*, it said, *you're not supposed to have me*. It was Sydney's, not his. *Give me back*.

When Sydney walked into the turtle dove coop he worked in back in February, Percy could've sworn he was seeing stars. The turtle dove coop was grimy, disgusting, no place for a demure woman. She had blonde locks and blue eyes, with pretty, pink Polly Pocket pants and a sequin handbag. Turtle doves were awful animals, they shat everywhere and lacked hygiene. Fat butchers came to the turtle dove coop. Weird, lanky bird enthusiasts came to the turtle dove coop. Girls didn't come to the turtle dove coop.

What are these, she asked, like they were the most interesting specimens in the world. It stunk in there, and Percy had only become numb after a year of working in the cramped room. How was she not recoiling in disgust—did she even notice the odor? And yet, she petted a turtle dove like it was a prized poodle. He loved this woman, he decided, right then and there. Anybody who could ignore the fermented smell of bird feces was a keeper. She said she'd come back next Tuesday, and Percy put the date in his vintage 1982-1983 Dolly Parton calendar, surrounded by a bright pink Crayola heart.

When Percy had traded with Holly, it had been simple, a spur-of-the-moment decision made mutually. Sydney's was a trickier process, but Percy felt as if he could endure. After the fifth time she came into the coop, did the rounds with the turtle doves, and left, he finally got fed up. This happens every time. There he was, smiling like the perfect guy. Helping her out. Placing his coat on the ground so she could step over the bird shit. And yet, it was the doves she coddled, giving them cutesy names like

“Brittney” and “Ganglow”. How he envied them.

*Dum. Ba-dum-ba-dum. Ba-dum-ba-dum-ba-dum.*

The noise was driving him insane. Every once in a while, in between beats, the heart would speak to him. He typed a couple more sentences in his manuscript, but his cognitive ability dwindled. Sentences became littered with spelling errors, punctuation problems. Short, terse. Words were now gibberish.

Sydney had 18,000 followers on Facebook, Percy had learnt. He had taken to filling in the days leading up to Tuesday perusing her various posts. They were just like her; tame yet teasing, the slit in a skirt or a wink on her face showing that she was aware of the effect she had on him. Mocking him with her friends, enjoying mimosas, away from him. She did the same thing when she was at the coop. A feather landed on her face from Rufus the turtle dove, and she brushed it off with a giggle. The smile she sent his way told Percy all he needed to know. She knew he wanted her to himself.

Another month. No heart.

It's surprising how much you can learn about someone on the internet. It was fairly easy for Percy to locate her general location from stores she shopped at. The Toys R Us five minutes away. The Blockbuster Video a block away. He used the time between shifts at the coop to track her exact location, navigating based off of when she got off work. When she got home. When she took a photo in the bath, bare legs splayed out.

It's surprising how easy it is to make a homemade sedative.

Her heart was beautiful. When he first recovered it, sneaking out into the light of the full moon and holding it up to analyze the prize, it practically glistened. His fingers traced along her veins, feeling the very essence of vitality and life. He clung desperately for the warmth within her arteries, and he barely minded the fluids leaked off of the organ, staining his shirt and pants. It pulsed softly, and he felt his own heart mirror the rhythm, two beings entwined as one. Her vibrations, and his. Her heart was perfect. Even the viscera and blood, the pungent aroma wafting in the air. Picture books could barely compare.

That's odd, he wondered, after taking a second look later that night without euphoria clouding his judgement. There was a faint scar running through the base of her heart.

*Badummmmm. Badum-badummmmm.*

Each throb echoed harshly in his ears. Desperate, Percy rooted through his closet. There were a few shoeboxes, but his feet were too small. A box of Honey Smacks looked like it would work perfectly, and he stuffed it with tissues before tucking it between the bookshelf and his desk. Muffled, its pleads couldn't reach him.

He meant to return it. He just wanted to experience what it was like in his adulthood. Only a couple of days, maybe a week. But it was those fucking turtle doves. Turtle doves are finicky creatures. If you leave the temperature a couple degrees too low, they get annoyed and die. If you forget to open the blinds in the morning, they get annoyed and die. If you don't feed them, they get annoyed and die. Sometimes they die just to make a statement, just because they haven't yet.

Percy's boss always scolded him if he got in late, because a couple more turtle doves would be dead by the time he entered, corpses twitching on the floor, feathers plucked by other turtle doves, a grand protest towards his tardiness. He couldn't return the heart to her yet. He needed to care for the turtle doves. So he kept the heart on his bed stand, kept pushing off his morals, and let the beat lull him to sleep each night. Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum.

*Badumbadumbadumbadumbadum.*

It was two at night when he woke up for the fourth time, eyes blurry and throat sore. The heart knew what it wanted, and it was determined to let Percy know. He threw it under the bed, and the vibrations kept him up another thirty minutes. *Take me back. Take me home.*

I'm lucky I live on the first floor, Percy thought, as he contorted his body to squeeze out the nearest window. Sydney's heart was stowed in the box, and out of fear of encountering some prying eye, he kept it tucked underneath his shirt. She was resting about thirty minutes from here.

Percy had been to her resting grounds before, a couple days ago, when things were fresh. The day prior, all the turtle doves died. All but one. Rufus waited for Percy to come into the coop that morning, stared at him with that thousand-yard stare all turtle doves have, and plopped down to the floor. Dead, just like all the others. Percy knew something was wrong.

*Badumpbadump. Bring me back to where I belong.*

With every step, her heart increased in tempo. He looked up at the towering iron sign, gothic letters reading *SAINT LATINVEEN'S RESTING GROUNDS*. Within the light of the full moon, the rolling fields of Saint Latinveen's were fully illuminated. Miles of holes, thin but not too thin, just big enough for a person to fit down. The craterous grounds emulated the surface of the moon, unnatural chasms bottomless to the naked eye. Each marked by a small stack of stones, a sole remnant of character within the barren, grassy leas.

The hole in question was maybe another 25 minutes of walking, but the relentless thumping of her heart helped reaffirm his location. The rocks sitting inches away from the hole were well-kept, maintained, fresh, smooth. His doing. After the funeral-goers had left the other day, he organized them. Stacked them. A perfect representation of Sydney, jagged rocks removed meticulously.

He wondered idly if she was still alive, down in the hole. If she was waiting to get her heart back before she passed on. The thought terrified him.

One last time, he took her heart out of the box. The passion he had once felt, the love coursing through its arteries, had gone. *Please. Please.* It was the one begging now. Desperation.

Holding it up to the moon once more, he traced the scar with his fingertips. An imperfection, a blemish. The true her. He brought it to his nose, smelling her aroma, feeling himself get high off of her love. Then, with a final shout of anguish, he threw it down, and watched as her heart plummeted out of view, out of his life.